Black in School: Readings in Race & Education

COLL 215 • Spring 2015

Figure 1: William H. Johnson, *Art Class* (ca. 1939–40)

Instructor

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Office Hours: T 1:30 p.m. until 3:00 p.m., and by appointment.

Meetings

Except for university holidays and other occasions either noted on the syllabus or announced in class, the course meets more or less every other Tuesday evening (beginning 1/20/14) from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. We will convene at Wilson House (Wiess College Masters House).

Course Description and Objectives

Students will study a handful of works in the humanities and social sciences that grapple with the ways that race (especially blackness) affects what transpires in the nation's classrooms—from kindergarten to college, and in our finest and most needy schools alike.

We'll ponder a number of questions over the course of the semester (analyzing and evaluating the questions themselves, but also endeavoring to answer, to the best of our abilities, some of the most challenging ones). Are there ways in which our schools remain segregated (in spite of the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place")? What are the causes and the costs of this continuing segregation (if segregation is indeed what we want to call it)? And if there are costs, are there benefits as well? Do black students (to paraphrase W. E. B. Du Bois) *need* separate schools? Are black schools necessarily *bad* schools (and, anyway, what are the prospects of changing so-called bad schools into so-called good ones)?

How do *black* students fare at black schools? White teachers at black schools? Black teachers at white schools? Black students at white schools? And in this day and age, what do we even mean by black student? Black teacher? Black school?

Beyond elementary, middle, and high school, how does *blackness* affect how students manage at the nation's universities? Its finest universities? In what ways are black secondary school experiences and collegiate experiences linked?

The course is primarily organized around just these sorts of questions, and the class readings will provide an expansive and largely structural perspective on the continuing significance of race in American schools. But the class also aims to encourage students to comprehend, to discuss, and to write about the subject at hand with particular focus on the personal, the family, and the community. So while the readings are particularly broad in scope, the course assignments and our class discussions will place a premium on manifesting our larger understandings in much smaller contexts.

The class, finally, is also a college course. As such, it seeks to take particular advantage of the university's residential college system. From time to time, we will reach out to and depend on the expertise of various college associates (as visitors and interlocutors). In creating and improving the work of the course, we will likewise take advantage of the spaces for public conversation and rehearsal provided by the college.

Figure 2: Sadie T. M. Alexander, Ph.D (1921)

Assessment & Assignments

The final grade for students enrolled in COLL 215 will be based on the following:

- performance on a mid-term review essay of 3-5 pages in length
  30% of the final grade

- contribution to creating and sustaining a vibrant intellectual community within the class through attentive listening, thoughtful conversation, productive criticism, and through other means that promote comity and facilitate learning
  20% of the final grade

- Performance on a course documentary project of 3-5 pages in length exploring an issue from the class through the experience of a single person (student, teacher, policy maker, et cetera).
  50% of the final grade

Further details concerning the assignments will be available on OwlSpace. Students who do not complete all assignments will receive a failing grade in the course. Work up to three days late is happily accepted (but will be graded without comment). Work submitted more than three days past the due date will receive a grade of 50%.

The due dates for the class assignments are as follows: **Final Project** (First Paragraph), Tues., Feb. 3; **Mid-term Review Essay** (First Page), Tues., Feb. 17; **Mid-term Review Essay** (final copy), Tues., Mar. 10; **Final Project** (one and a half pages), Tues., Mar. 17; **Final Project** (full draft), Tues., Apr. 7; and **Final Project** (final copy), Fri., Apr. 21.

Books and Readings

The following books form the course's core reading. I will provide a half-priced copy of each book to students who are enrolled on the first day of class. Please pick up your books from Ewart Jones in the Wiess College office on Wednesday, January 21.

Thompson, Charles H., ed. "The Courts and the Negro Separate School." Special Issue, *Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (1935)

Straus, Emily. *Death of a Suburban Dream: Race and Schools in Compton, California*. ISBN: ISBN 978-08122-4598-1

Payne, Charles M. *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools*. ISBN: 978-1891792-88-5

Charles, Camille Z., et. al. *Taming the River: Negotiating the Academic, Financial, and Social Currents in Selective Colleges and Universities*. ISBN: 978-0691139647

Statement Regarding Disability

Students with a documented disability and in need of academic or other adjustments should speak with me during the first two weeks of class (all communication will remain confidential). Students with disabilities should also contact the office of Disabled Student Services in Allen Center room 111 (phone 737-5841, e-mail **adarice@rice.edu**).

Course Calendar

The course schedule is given below. All reading assignments should be completed on or before the day of our meeting.

Getting Under Way

Jan. 20: June Jordan, "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan," *Harvard Educational Review* 58, no. 3 (1988): 363–374.

The Separate School: Origins, Remedies, Prospects

Feb. 3: "The Courts and the Negro Separate School," 289–292, 321–327, 328–335, and 406–441.

The Separate School: Contemporary Evolutions

Feb. 17: *Death of a Suburban Dream*, Introduction and chs. 1–4

Mar. 10: *Death of a Suburban Dream*, chs. 5–7 and Epilogue

Special Meeting: Dinner and Discussion with Prof. Emily Straus

Mar. 17: Dinner at the house with the author of *Death of a Suburban Dream*.

Urban Classrooms and Failure: A Legacy of Segregation?

Mar 24: *So Much Reform, So Little Change*

Black on Campus: The Separate School and Highly-Selective Universities

Apr. 7: *Taming the River*, chs. 1–5

Apr. 21: *Taming the River*, chs. 6–9

Figure 3: Jacob Lawrence, *The Migration of the Negro*, panel 58 (1940–41)